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PATENT APPLICATION

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Attorney's Docket No.:
068068.0103

Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing is the original patent application of:

Inventors: David S. Litman, et al.

For: *SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS
INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS*

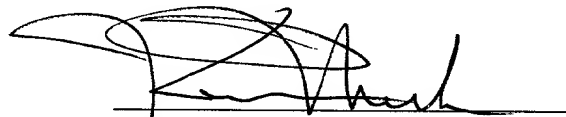
Enclosed are: Specification, Claims and Abstract (29 Total Pages)
9 Sheets of Informal Drawings
Unsigned Declaration and Power of Attorney
Verified Statement Claiming Small Entity Status
Acknowledgment Post Card

FEE CALCULATION					FEE
	Number		Number Extra	Rate	Basic Fee \$345.00
Total Claims:	40	-20 =	20	\$ 9 =	\$180.00
Independent Claims	4	- 3 =	1	\$39 =	\$ 39.00
TOTAL FILING FEE =					\$564.00

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6/6/00
Date


Kevin J. Meek
Registration No. 33,738

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of: David S. Litman, et al.
Date Filed: June 6, 2000
Title: *SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING
TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING GENERICALLY
IDENTIFIED ITEMS*

Box Patent Application
Assistant Commissioner
of Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Dear Sir:

CERTIFICATE OF MAILING BY EXPRESS MAIL

I hereby certify that the attached Patent Application, unsigned Declaration and Power of Attorney, nine sheets of Formal Drawings, Fee Transmittal, Verified Statement Claiming Small Entity Status, this Certificate of Mailing and a check in the amount of \$564.00 are being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37 C.F.R. § 1.10 on this 6th day of June, 2000 and is addressed to the Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231.


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Applicant or Patentee: David S. Litman, et al.

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Filed or Issued:

Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS

**VERIFIED STATEMENT (DECLARATION) CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS
(37 CFR 1.9(f) & 1.27(c)) - SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN**

I hereby declare that I am an official of the small business concern empowered to act on behalf of the concern identified below:

Name of Small Business Concern: Hotel Reservation Network, Inc.
Address of Small Business Concern: 8140 Walnut Hill Lane, Suite 203
Dallas, Texas 75231

I hereby declare that the above-identified small business concern qualifies as a small business concern as defined in 13 CFR 121.12, and reproduced in 37 CFR 1.9(d), for purposes of paying reduced fees to the United States Patent and Trademark Office, in that the number of employees of the concern, including those of its affiliates, does not exceed 500 persons. For purposes of this statement, (1) the number of employees of the business concern is the average over the previous fiscal year of the concern of the persons employed on a full-time, part-time or temporary basis during each of the pay periods of the fiscal year, and (2) concerns are affiliates of each other when either, directly or indirectly, one concern controls or has the power to control the other, or a third party or parties controls or has the power to control both.

I hereby declare that rights under contract or law have been conveyed to and remain with the small business concern identified above with regard to the invention, entitled SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS, described in the specification filed herewith.

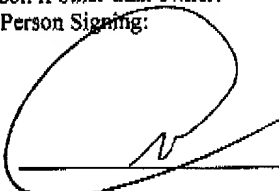
If the rights held by the above-identified small business concern are not exclusive, each individual, concern or organization having rights in the invention is listed below, and no rights to the invention are held by any person, other than the inventor, who would not qualify as an independent inventor under 37 CFR 1.9(c) if that person made the invention, or by any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d), or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e):

NONE

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or my maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b)).

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application, any patent issuing thereon, or any patent to which this verified statement is directed.

Name of Person Signing: David S. Litman
Title of Person if other than owner: Chief Executive Officer
Address of Person Signing: 8140 Walnut Hill Lane, Suite 203
Dallas, Texas 75231

Signature: 

Date: 6/5/00

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS
INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to the field of product and service transactions, and more particularly to a system and method for conducting transactions involving generically identified items.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When planning a vacation or business trip, travelers have a wide array of sources through which they can make lodging arrangements. These sources include the actual lodging establishments themselves as well as a number of third parties through which reservations may be made. These third parties include travel reservation companies that provide World Wide Web ("Web") sites or telephone call centers through which customers can reserve hotel rooms. These Web sites and call centers are abundant and competition to attract customers pressures these third parties to provide low lodging prices. This competition is heightened by the ease of comparison shopping between travel reservation companies on the Web. However, although lodging establishments may wish to provide their rooms for resale by these third parties at discount prices (to ensure that the maximum number of rooms are occupied at any given time), the lodging establishments do not want to undercut their regular room prices by flooding the market with discounted prices. For example, many customers may be willing to pay the regular price for a hotel room, but instead may find and make a reservation at a discounted price offered by a reservation company. Therefore, many hotels and other lodging establishments do not sell their rooms or sell a limited number of rooms through these third parties at discounted prices.

One company that has attempted to address this problem is Priceline.com. Priceline.com uses a "reverse auction" technique where customers select a location, date and price for which they would like a hotel room, and Priceline.com then provides this bid to hotels. If a hotel accepts the bid, the customer is typically required to stay at the accepting hotel. However, a customer knows very little about the hotel before being bound by a bid that the customer has made. For example, the customer may only be able to specify a minimum rating on a rating scale that the accepting hotel must have and a general location at which the hotel is located, such as in a downtown area. Therefore, many customers are reluctant to use this service and hotels are restricted in their ability to sell their excess rooms at a discounted price.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, disadvantages and problems associated with previous systems and methods have been substantially reduced or eliminated.

According to one embodiment of the present invention, a transaction system
5 includes an item master database that stores generic information and specific information associated with one or more items and an inventory database that stores availability and price data associated with the items. The transaction system also includes a transaction engine that receives an item availability request including one or more parameters. The transaction engine accesses the item master database and the
10 inventory database to obtain information associated with the request and determines one or more items that meet the parameters of the request. The transaction system also communicates a list of the items meeting the parameters. The list includes at least one generic item listing. Furthermore, the transaction system receives a request for an item associated with a generic item listing and completes a transaction associated with the item.
15

According to another embodiment of the present invention, a hotel reservation system includes a hotel master database that stores generic information and specific information associated with one or more hotels and an inventory database that stores a number of rooms available at the hotels on one or more dates and a price of each
20 room. The hotel reservation system also includes a reservation engine that receives a hotel availability request that includes one or more parameters. The reservation engine accesses the hotel master database and the inventory database to obtain information associated with the request and determines one or more hotels that meet the parameters of the request. The reservation engine communicates a list of the
25 hotels meeting the parameters. The list of hotels includes at least one generic hotel listing. Furthermore, the reservation engine receives a reservation request for a hotel associated with a generic hotel listing and creates a reservation according to the reservation request.

The systems and methods of the present invention provide a number of
30 important technical advantages. The present invention overcomes the problem of

undercutting non-discounted hotel room prices associated with prior reservation systems by providing generic listings of hotels having discounted room prices that do not disclose the identity of the hotel, but which provide sufficient information to allow a user to select an appropriate hotel. Since the hotel's real name is not identified until
5 after the user has made a reservation, users are prevented from comparing the discounted price of a particular hotel listed by the present invention and a higher non-discounted price listed by the hotel, third-party reservation systems, or any other source. For example, if a user were to perform a search on the Web for a specific hotel name and associated prices, Web pages associated with the present invention
10 would typically not be found since only a generic name is associated with the hotel (at least initially).

Furthermore, unlike previous systems and methods, such as Priceline.com's reverse auction, the present invention provides a user with both a price of a hotel room and an adequate description of the hotel before the user must commit to making
15 a reservation. Therefore, hotels are allowed to sell rooms at discounted prices without initially revealing their identity and users are given sufficient information about the hotel to make an informed reservation decision. In addition, the system and method of the present invention may be used for transactions associated with other items besides hotel rooms. Therefore, the advantages described above apply equally to
20 transactions involving other products and services besides hotel rooms.

Other important technical advantages are readily apparent to those skilled in the art.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

To provide a more complete understanding of the present invention and further features and advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

5 FIGURE 1 illustrates an exemplary hotel reservation system incorporating teachings of the present invention;

 FIGURE 2 illustrates an exemplary hotel search page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

10 FIGURE 3 illustrates an exemplary hotel listing page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

 FIGURE 4 illustrates an exemplary generic hotel description page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

 FIGURE 5 illustrates an exemplary reservation inquiry page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

15 FIGURE 6 illustrates an exemplary reservation verification page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

 FIGURE 7 illustrates an exemplary reservation confirmation page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system;

20 FIGURE 8 illustrates an exemplary specific hotel description page that may be communicated by the hotel reservation system; and

 FIGURE 9 illustrates an exemplary method for making a reservation using the reservation system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

FIGURE 1 illustrates an exemplary hotel reservation system 10 incorporating teachings of the present invention. The term "hotel" should be understood to include any appropriate type of lodging including, but not limited to, hotels, motels, lodges, inns, condominiums, hotels, and cottages. Likewise, the terms "hotel room" or "room" includes any appropriate unit of a "hotel" that may be reserved using reservation system 10. Reservation system 10 includes a reservation engine 12 that may receive inquiries regarding hotel availability, communicate selected hotel options and information to the requestor, receive and process hotel reservation requests, and perform any other appropriate functions related to the booking of hotel reservations. Reservation engine 12 is coupled to a hotel master database 14 that includes information relating to hotels at which reservations may be made through reservation system 10. As described below, hotel master database 14 may include both generic descriptions 16 of hotels and specific descriptions 18 of hotels. Reservation engine 12 is also coupled to an inventory database 20, which may be integral to or separate from hotel master database 14. Inventory database 20 may include data indicating the number of rooms available for a certain date or dates at the hotels in hotel master database 14. Inventory database 20 may also include data indicating the price of the rooms on the available dates. Reservation engine 12, hotel master database 14, and inventory database 20 may be implemented together or separately as software and/or hardware that operates on one or more computers 22 at one or more locations.

Reservation system 10 may be coupled to the Internet 30 or any other suitable wireline or wireless network that supports communications between one or more computers 32a-32n and reservation system 10. In a particular embodiment, reservation system 10 includes Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) documents or other suitable documents that may be communicated over Internet 30 for display on computers 32. The term "Web pages" will be used to encompass HTML documents and any other appropriate techniques of displaying content using Internet 30, such as Extensible Markup Language (XML) documents. Computers 32 may include interfaces, Web browsers, or any other hardware, software or other components to

facilitate connection to Internet 30 and display of Web pages. For example, generic descriptions 16 and specific descriptions 18 of hotels in hotel master database 14 may be included in Web pages that reservation engine 12 communicates over Internet 30 and that are displayed at computers 32. Other appropriate Web pages that are used in the operation of reservation system 10 and which are described below may be stored in hotel master database 14 or any other appropriate storage medium associated with reservation system 10.

Reservation system 10 may also be coupled to a call center 40. Call center 40 may be coupled to any appropriate telephone network 42, such as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), and includes one or more operators that receive calls from users of telephones 44a-44n coupled to telephone network 42. Instead of or in addition to communicating Web pages to computers 32, reservation engine 12 may also communicate call scripts to operators located at call center 40. These call scripts may be displayed on a computer so that the operator can read the script to a user that has called call center 40 using a telephone 44. For example, generic descriptions 16 and specific descriptions 18 of hotels in hotel master database 14 may be included in scripts that reservation engine 12 communicates to call center 40. Alternatively, reservation engine 12 may communicate Web pages to operators at call center 40 so that the operators may read the contents of the Web pages to users of telephones 44.

In an exemplary embodiment, reservation system 10 is maintained and run by a third party, such as a travel reservation company or a travel agent, that reserves hotel rooms from numerous hotels and offers the rooms to the general public. Reservation system 10 may also be maintained and run by one or more hotels. In an exemplary transaction using Internet 30, a user using a computer 32 requests a Web site associated with the travel reservation company or other appropriate entity. The Web site provides the user with a selection of different cities in which hotels are available. The user then selects a city and other appropriate criteria, such as the date on which a hotel room is desired. In response to the user's selection, reservation system 10 provides the user with a list of available hotels. A similar list may be

provided over the phone by a user that has called in to call center 40 using telephone network 42.

Reservation system 10 and previous reservation systems may be used to provide discount hotel prices based on volume discounts or other special pricing arrangements made with hotels. In response to reservation inquiries by users, prior reservation systems have typically provided the user with a list of specific hotel names that meet the user's criteria. However, due to the discount prices offered through the reservation system, many hotels choose not to be included in these lists to prevent their regular, non-discounted prices from being undercut. For this reason, the number of hotels at which reservations may be made using prior reservation systems has been limited. Reservation system 10 of the present invention overcomes this disadvantage associated with prior reservation systems by providing generic listings of hotels that do not disclose the identity of the hotel, but which provide sufficient information to allow a user to select an appropriate hotel. Since the hotel's real name is not identified until after the user has made a reservation, users are prevented from comparing the discounted price of a specific hotel listed by reservation system 10 and a higher non-discounted price listed by the hotel, other reservation systems, or any other source.

In addition, although hotel reservation system 10 is described, the present invention also encompasses the generic identification or description of any product or service in the initial stages of a sale, promotion, auction, or trading of the product or service or any other appropriate transaction associated with the product or service. The term "item" will be used to encompass any such products or services. For example, instead of a hotel room, generically identified airline tickets or complete vacation packages could also marketed and sold. Furthermore, non-travel related items, such as electronics, food products, automobiles, repair services or any other items can be sold or otherwise distributed using generic identifications and descriptions. The generic hotel transaction process described below has many other applications that are included within the scope of the present invention and will be recognized by one of skill in the art. For those transactions that do not involve hotel

rooms or other items that may be reserved, reservation engine 12 may be replaced by a transaction engine that is operable to perform any transaction associated with generically identified items (not just making reservations). Furthermore, hotel master database 14 may be replaced by an item master database that includes information associated with any type of item, and inventory database 20 may include availability and price data associated with these items.

FIGURES 2 through 8 illustrate exemplary Web pages that may be provided or "served" by reservation engine 12 to one or more computers 32 to facilitate the hotel reservation process. It should be understood that many other appropriate Web pages may be provided in addition to or instead of the illustrated Web pages, which are provided only as examples. Appropriate modifications may be made to the content of the Web pages for transactions involving items other than hotel rooms. In addition, although Web pages are illustrated, similar scripts may be provided to an operator at call center 40 to facilitate the telephone reservation process. References below to a user selecting an option on a Web page may alternatively be performed in a telephone reservation situation by the user verbally selecting an option or using any other appropriate method, such as entering a touch tone digit using telephone 44.

FIGURE 2 illustrates an exemplary hotel search page 100. Search page 100 includes one or more availability search fields 102 that allow a user at a computer 32 to search for available hotels meeting certain parameters entered by the user in search fields 102. Although exemplary search page 100 is specifically a Web page for hotels in New York (which may be provided based on the user's selection of New York on a previous Web page), search page 100 may allow a search of hotels in numerous cities and include a search field for the city in which the hotel stay is desired. Furthermore, any other appropriate search fields 102 may also be included. Using information selected or input by the user in search fields 102 and communicated to reservation engine 12, reservation engine 12 may generate a listing of hotels that meet the search requirements.

In addition to providing a search mechanism, search page 100 also provides the user with display options 104 that allow all available hotels (in New York, for

example) to be displayed in order according to a certain parameter. For example, the hotels available in New York may be displayed in order according to their name (alphabetical order), quality (for example, based on a star rating scale), price, or location. The hotels may also be ordered in any other appropriate manner. Search
5 page 100 may also include a name search field 106 that allows users to enter the name of a hotel or a portion of the name of a hotel for which the user would like reservation information.

FIGURE 3 illustrates an exemplary hotel listing page 110. Listing page 110
10 includes a list 112 of hotels generated by reservation engine 12 in response to a search or other request by a user. For example, listing page 110 may be communicated from reservation engine 12 to a computer 32 in response to a user's search for hotels in New York having rooms available on May 29-30, 2000. Reservation engine may access hotel master database 14 to determine hotels that meet the user's search criteria and may access inventory database 20 to determine which of these hotels have rooms
15 available for the dates selected by the user. Reservation engine may then generate an appropriate list 112 in response to the information obtained from hotel master database 14 and inventory database 20.

List 112 may include a hotel name, a location, and a room price for each date requested. As described above, unlike previous reservations systems, reservation
20 engine 12 may include one more generic hotel listings 114. Although each generic hotel listing 114 is associated with a specific hotel, listing 114 identifies the hotel using a generic name and an approximate location. For example, generic hotel listings 114 may use the generic name "Major Brand Hotel" and may identify a general location of the hotel (for example, "Downtown"). Generic hotel listings 114
25 include the actual price of the room at the associated hotel, which is typically discounted from the price that is advertised by the hotel or that is listed with travel agents. As described above, this allows a hotel to sell rooms at a discounted price without undercutting the hotel's regular room prices (or less discounted room prices) listed at other web sites, in brochures, at travel agencies, or any other appropriate
30 location. Reservation engine 12 may determine that a generic hotel listing 114 should

be displayed for a hotel based on a flag or other indicator associated with the hotel's information in either database 14 or 20. Reservation engine may alternatively make this determination in any other appropriate manner.

5 List 112 also may include one or more specific hotel listings 116 that include specific hotel names and locations. In some cases, specific hotel listings 116 may identify hotels that are associated with generic hotel listings 114 in the same list 112. In this case, the price identified in the generic hotel listing 114 may be lower than the price identified in the specific hotel listing 116 even though the listings are associated with the same hotel. Although generic and specific hotel listings 114 and 116 are not
10 listed in a particular order in list 112, listings 114 and 116 may be ordered by name, location, price, hotel rating, type of listing (either generic listings 114 or specific listings 116 first), or in any other appropriate manner.

Hotel listing page 110 may also include an option to obtain more information about generic hotel listings 114. For example, hotel listing page 110 may include a
15 information button 115 that a user may select to obtain a description that explains the "Major Brand Hotel" generic listings 114. This description may include certain obligations of a party making a reservation at a generically described hotel (such as a required reservation cancellation fee). Information button 115 may also be included on any other appropriate Web page. Hotel listing page 110 may also include options
20 to make a reservation at a hotel, get information about a hotel, or get a map of a hotel's location. In exemplary hotel listing page 110, a user may select these options using a "Book It" button 118, a "Hotel Info" button 120, or a "Map" button 122, respectively. The result of a user selecting buttons 118 and 120 is described below. The result of a user selecting button 122 is the display of a map identifying the
25 location of the associated hotel. If this option is selected for a generic hotel listing 114, this map displayed may only show a general area, such as downtown New York, and the exact location of the associated hotel will not be identified. Alternatively, map button 122 may not be provided for generic hotel listings 114.

FIGURE 4 illustrates an exemplary generic hotel description page 130.
30 Description page 130 is an example of a Web page that reservation engine 12 may

communicate to a user in response to the selection of a "Hotel Info" button 120 of hotel listing page 110. In particular, description page 130 includes a generic textual description 132 that may be associated with a generic hotel listing 114. As described above, generic descriptions 16 and specific descriptions 18 of hotels may be stored in hotel master database 12. A generic description 16 of a particular hotel may be the HTML or other Web document that is communicated as generic description page 130. Alternatively, generic description 16 may include information used to generate generic description page 130, including generic textual description 132. Generic description page 130 may be derived from a specific description 18 associated with the hotel represented by generic description page 130, and specific description 18 may be modified to remove information that might directly identify the particular hotel to the user. For example, if specific description 18 indicates that the hotel is located next the World Trade Center in New York, generic description 16 (and thus generic description page 130) may instead indicate that the hotel is located in the downtown area. Description page 130 may also include other relevant generic information, such as the hotel's star rating, general location, and property amenities. It should be understood that although generic description page 130 does not "directly identify" the hotel (for example, by giving the hotel name), it is possible that a user may be able to deduce the identity of the hotel based on other information known to the user. For example, if a user knows that there is only one hotel in a certain area, then the generic description of a hotel located in that area may identify the hotel to the user.

FIGURE 5 illustrates an exemplary reservation inquiry page 140. Reservation inquiry page 140 is an example of a Web page that reservation engine 12 may communicate to a user in response to the selection of a "Book It" button 120 of hotel listing page 110. Reservation engine 12 may also communicate reservation inquiry page 140 to the user based on any other type of request by the user to make a reservation at a particular hotel. Inquiry page 140 is associated with a generic hotel listing 114 and thus does not include a specific hotel name. Inquiry page 140 may include one or more room type options 142 that a user might select at the hotel and one or more user information fields 144 in which the user may enter information that

is used to make the reservation. This user information requested may include the user's name, address, telephone number, payment information, or any other appropriate information. When the user has selected or entered the necessary information, the user may select a continue button 146 to continue with the reservation process. When continue button 146 is selected, the user information is communicated from the user's computer 32 to reservation engine 12. Alternately, the user may communicate the information to an operator at call center 40, who then communicates the information to reservation engine 12.

FIGURE 6 illustrates an exemplary reservation verification page 150 that may be communicated to the user's computer 32 in response to the user selecting continue button 146. Reservation engine 12 generates verification page 150 based on the user information received from the user. Verification page 150 provides a summary 152 of this information so that the user can determine whether the user information as entered and communicated correctly. The exemplary verification page 150 that is illustrated is associated with a generic hotel listing 114 since a generic hotel name is used to identify where the reservation is to be made. Reservation page 150 may also include information regarding the reservation process and contractual duties of the user once the reservation has been made (such as a cancellation fee that is required if the reservation is cancelled). Verification page 150 includes a book reservation button 154 that the user may select if the information listed on verification page is correct and the user desires to proceed with the reservation. Alternatively, the user may select an option to return to reservation inquiry page 140 or a similar page to re-enter incorrect user information.

When the user selects book reservation button 154 or otherwise indicates a desire to continue with the reservation, reservation engine 12 processes the user information to create a reservation. For example, reservation engine 12 may check the payment information, such as a credit card number, and charge the reservation to the credit card. Reservation engine 12 may also create a record of the reservation to be delivered to the hotel at which the reservation was made. This record may be

delivered to the hotel at any appropriate time, including a batch delivery of all reservation records at the end of a business day.

Furthermore, reservation engine 12 may decrement the number of rooms available at the selected hotel in inventory database 20. Therefore, the room reserved by the user will not be available to subsequent users. If the room reserved by the user was the last room available on a certain date, the generic hotel listing 114 associated with the hotel may no longer be included in a hotel list 112 associated with a user search for available hotels on that date. Inventory database 20 may include an inventory of rooms that are actually available at a hotel and may be updated by hotels as needed. Alternatively, inventory database 20 may include a number of rooms that have been pre-reserved by an entity controlling reservation system 10 and that are effectively being "re-sold" to users of reservation system 10. In this case, hotels may have access to inventory database 20 or to another appropriate component associated with inventory database 20 so that the hotels can add rooms to the entity's inventory or change the price of the rooms in the inventory. For example, the entity controlling reservation system 10 may allow a hotel to reduce the price of the rooms that the entity has already pre-reserved. Any other appropriate method of making hotel rooms available to a third party intermediary that then provides the rooms to users is also included within the scope of the present invention.

FIGURE 7 illustrates an exemplary reservation confirmation page 160. When the user has verified that the user information is correct and that the user desires to make the reservation, reservation engine 12 makes the reservation and communicates confirmation page 160 to the user's computer 32. At this point in the reservation process, reservation engine 12 discloses the specific identity of the hotel which previously has been described to the user in a generic manner (for example, using generic hotel description page 130). Therefore, confirmation page 160 may include contact and link information 162, such as links associated with the specific hotel at which the reservation has been made and the city in which the hotel is located. A link to a map of the exact location of the hotel may also be included. Confirmation page 160 may also include reservation details 164. Again, details 164 include the specific

name of the hotel and other information associated with the reservation, such as the check-in date and the number of nights for which the room is reserved.

FIGURE 8 illustrates an exemplary specific hotel description page 170. Specific description page 170 may be communicated to the user's computer 32 in response to a request for hotel information by the user after the reservation has been made (for example, the user's selection of the "Hotel Info" option included in reservation confirmation page 160). Specific description page 170 is similar to generic description page 130, described above, since they are both descriptions of the same hotel. However, specific description page 170 includes more detail about the hotel since the identity of the hotel may now be disclosed to the user. For example, the illustrated specific description page 170 includes the name 172 of the hotel (instead of the previous "Major Brand Hotel" name), an address 174 of the hotel, and a picture 176 of the hotel. Specific description page 170 also includes a specific textual description 178 that includes details about the hotel that may not have been included in generic textual description 132 so as to conceal the identity of the hotel. Any other appropriate descriptive information may also be included in specific hotel description page 170.

FIGURE 9 illustrates an exemplary method for making a reservation using reservation system 10. The method starts at step 202 when reservation engine 12 receives a hotel availability request from a user. As described above, the hotel request may be communicated over Internet 30 from a user at a computer 32, may be received at call center 40 from a user of a telephone 44, or may be received by reservation engine 12 in any other appropriate manner. Again, all references below to the communication of Web pages between the user and reservation engine 12 apply equally to communications between reservation engine 12 and an operator at call center 40 and communications between the operator and a user of a telephone 44. The hotel availability request may include one or more parameters that a hotel must meet, such as a location, dates of availability, rating, or any other suitable parameters. At step 204, reservation engine 12 determines one or more available hotels that meet the parameters of the request by accessing information stored in hotel master database

14 and/or inventory database 20. If reservation engine determines at step 206 that no hotels meet the parameters, then reservation engine 12 communicates a message to the user at step 208 indicating that no hotels meeting the request are available. The method may then end and reservation engine 12 may allow the user to try another search.

5 If reservation engine 12 determines at step 206 that one or more hotels meet the parameters of the request, then reservation engine 12 communicates a list of available generic and specific hotels, such as list 112, to the user at step 210. Reservation engine may then receive a request for a hotel description at step 212. 10 Reservation engine 12 determines at step 214 whether the hotel listing for which the description was requested is a generic hotel listing 114 or a specific hotel listing 116. If the hotel listing is a generic hotel listing 114, reservation engine communicates a generic hotel description, such as generic description page 130, to the user at step 216. If the hotel listing is a specific hotel listing 116, reservation engine communicates a 15 more detailed hotel description, such as specific description page 170, to the user at step 218. Reservation engine 12 may then receive a hotel reservation request from the user at step 220 indicating that the user desires to reserve a room at a selected hotel. Alternatively, reservation engine 12 may receive the reservation request after communicating the list of available hotels at step 210 or at any other appropriate time.

20 At step 222, reservation engine 12 communicates a reservation information inquiry, such as reservation inquiry page 140, to the user requesting information about the user to be used in making the reservation. The requested information may include the user's name, address, telephone number, and credit card number. Reservation engine 12 receives the user information at step 224 in response to the reservation 25 information inquiry and processes the information at step 226 to create a reservation as specified by the user. As described above, reservation engine 12 may verify that the user information received is correct before processing the user information. Reservation engine 12 then communicates specific hotel reservation information, such as reservation confirmation page 160 and/or specific hotel description page 170, to the 30 user at step 228. As described above, this information may be the first specific

information that the user receives about the previously generically identified hotel at which the user has a reservation. Therefore, reservation system 10 provides a process of making a reservation at a hotel without disclosing the identity of the hotel to the user until after the reservation has been made. Among other advantages, this generic hotel reservation process allows a hotel to provide rooms at a discount price without undercutting the hotel's non-discounted price or less discounted price for the same rooms. Furthermore, the present invention also includes similar methods for providing other items using generic descriptions to initially conceal the identity of the item.

Although the present invention has been described with several embodiments, numerous changes, substitutions, variations, alterations, and modifications may be suggested to one skilled in the art, and it is intended that the invention encompass all such changes, substitutions, variations, alterations, and modifications as fall within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A hotel reservation system, comprising:

a hotel master database operable to store generic information and specific information associated with one or more hotels;

5 an inventory database operable to store a number of rooms available at the hotels on one or more dates and a price of each room; and

a reservation engine operable to:

receive a hotel availability request, the request including one or more parameters;

10 access the hotel master database and the inventory database to obtain information associated with the request;

determine one or more hotels that meet the parameters of the request in response to obtaining the information from the hotel master database and the inventory database;

15 communicate a list of the hotels meeting the parameters, the list including at least one generic hotel listing;

receive a reservation request for a hotel associated with a generic hotel listing; and

create a reservation according to the reservation request.

20

2. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the reservation engine is further operable to:

receive a request for a description of a hotel associated with a generic hotel listing; and

25 communicate a generic description of the hotel, wherein the generic description does not directly identify the hotel.

3. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the reservation engine is further operable to communicate a specific description of the hotel at which a reservation has been created, the specific description identifying the hotel.

30

4. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the generic information stored in the hotel master database comprises a generic name of a hotel and a generic description of a hotel.

5 5. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the specific information stored in the hotel master database comprises a specific name of a hotel and a specific description of a hotel.

10 6. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the price of one or more rooms stored in the inventory database comprises a discounted price associated with a generic hotel listing.

15 7. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the parameters included in the hotel availability request comprise a date or dates for which a room is requested.

20 8. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein the generic hotel listing comprises a generic hotel name and a price of a hotel room at a hotel associated with the generic hotel listing.

9. The hotel reservation system of Claim 8, wherein the generic hotel listing further comprises an approximate location of the hotel associated with the generic hotel listing.

10. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein:

the reservation engine is coupled to the Internet; and

the reservation engine is further operable to:

receive the hotel availability request from a computer coupled to the

5 Internet; and

communicate the list of hotels to the computer in the form of one or
more Web pages.

11. The hotel reservation system of Claim 1, wherein:

10 the reservation engine is coupled to a call center, the call center coupled to a
telephone network and operable to receive calls from telephone users; and

the reservation engine is further operable to:

receive the hotel availability request from an operator at the call center,

15 the operator receiving the hotel availability request from the telephone user over the
telephone network; and

communicate the list of hotels to the operator for communication to the
telephone user.

12. A method for making hotel reservations, comprising:

receiving a hotel availability request, the request including one or more parameters;

obtaining information associated with the request from one or more databases,
the databases including generic information and specific information associated with
one or more hotels, a number of rooms available at the hotels on one or more dates,
and a price of each room;

determining one or more hotels that meet the parameters of the request in
response to obtaining the information from the databases;

communicating a list of the hotels meeting the parameters, the list including at
least one generic hotel listing;

receiving a reservation request for a hotel associated with a generic hotel
listing; and

creating a reservation according to the reservation request.

13. The method of Claim 12, further comprising:

receiving a request for a description of a hotel associated with a generic hotel
listing; and

communicating a generic description of the hotel, wherein the generic
description does not directly identify the hotel.

14. The method of Claim 12, further comprising communicating a specific
description of the hotel at which a reservation has been created, the specific
description identifying the hotel.

15. The method of Claim 12, wherein the generic information included in
the one or more databases comprises a generic name of a hotel and a generic
description of a hotel.

16. The method of Claim 12, wherein the specific information included in the one or more databases comprises a specific name of a hotel and a specific description of a hotel.

5 17. The method of Claim 12, wherein the price of one or more rooms included in the one or more databases comprises a discounted price associated with a generic hotel listing.

10 18. The method of Claim 12, wherein the parameters included in the hotel availability request comprise a date or dates for which a room is requested.

15 19. The method of Claim 12, wherein the generic hotel listing comprises a generic hotel name and a price of a hotel room at a hotel associated with the generic hotel listing.

20 20. The method of Claim 19, wherein the generic hotel listing further comprises an approximate location of the hotel associated with the generic hotel listing.

21. The method of Claim 12, wherein:
receiving the hotel availability request comprises receiving the request from a computer coupled to the Internet; and
communicating the list of hotels comprises communicating the list to the computer in the form of one or more Web pages.

22. The method of Claim 12, wherein:

receiving the hotel availability request comprises receiving the request from an operator at a call center, the call center coupled to a telephone network and the operator operable to receive the hotel availability request from a telephone user over the telephone network; and

communicating the list of hotels comprises communicating the list to the operator for communication to the telephone user.

23. A transaction system, comprising:

an item master database operable to store generic information and specific information associated with one or more items;

an inventory database operable to store availability and price data associated with the items; and

a transaction engine operable to:

receive an item availability request, the request including one or more parameters;

access the item master database and the inventory database to obtain information associated with the request;

determine one or more items that meet the parameters of the request in response to obtaining the information from the item master database and the inventory database;

communicate a list of the items meeting the parameters, the list including at least one generic item listing;

receive a request for an item associated with a generic item listing; and
complete a transaction associated with the item.

24. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the transaction engine is further operable to:

receive a request for a description of an item associated with a generic item listing; and

communicate a generic description of the item, wherein the generic description does not directly identify the item.

25. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the transaction engine is further operable to communicate a specific description of the item for which a transaction has been completed, the specific description identifying the item.

26. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the generic information stored in the item master database comprises a generic name of an item and a generic description of an item.

5 27. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the specific information stored in the item master database comprises a specific name of an item and a specific description of an item.

10 28. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the price data stored in the inventory database comprises a discounted price associated with a generic item listing.

15 29. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein the generic item listing comprises a generic item name and a price of an item associated with the generic item listing.

20 30. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein:
the transaction engine is coupled to the Internet; and
the transaction engine is further operable to:
receive the item availability request from a computer coupled to the
Internet; and
communicate the list of items to the computer in the form of one or
more Web pages.

31. The transaction system of Claim 23, wherein:

the transaction engine is coupled to a call center, the call center coupled to a telephone network and operable to receive calls from telephone users; and

the transaction engine is further operable to:

5 receive the item availability request from an operator at the call center, the operator receiving the item availability request from the telephone user over the telephone network; and

communicate the list of items to the operator for communication to the telephone user.

32. A method for conducting transactions involving generically identified items, comprising:

receiving an item availability request, the request including one or more parameters;

5 obtaining information associated with the request from one or more databases, the databases including generic information and specific information associated with one or more items, availability data associated with the items, and a price of each item;

10 determining one or more items that meet the parameters of the request in response to obtaining the information from the databases;

communicating a list of the items meeting the parameters, the list including at least one generic item listing;

receiving a request for an item associated with a generic item listing; and

15 completing a transaction according to the request.

33. The method of Claim 32, further comprising:

receiving a request for a description of an item associated with a generic item listing; and

20 communicating a generic description of the item, wherein the generic description does not directly identify the item.

34. The method of Claim 32, further comprising communicating a specific description of the item after a transaction for the item has been completed, the specific description identifying the item.

25 35. The method of Claim 32, wherein the generic information included in the one or more databases comprises a generic name of an item and a generic description of an item.

36. The method of Claim 32, wherein the specific information included in the one or more databases comprises a specific name of an item and a specific description of an item.

5 37. The method of Claim 32, wherein the price of one or more items included in the one or more databases comprises a discounted price associated with a generic item listing.

10 38. The method of Claim 32, wherein the generic item listing comprises a generic item name and a price of an item associated with the generic item listing.

39. The method of Claim 32, wherein:
receiving the item availability request comprises receiving the request from a computer coupled to the Internet; and
15 communicating the list of items comprises communicating the list to the computer in the form of one or more Web pages.

40. The method of Claim 32, wherein:
receiving the item availability request comprises receiving the request from an operator at a call center, the call center coupled to a telephone network and the operator operable to receive the item availability request from a telephone user over the telephone network; and
20 communicating the list of items comprises communicating the list to the operator for communication to the telephone user.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS
INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A transaction system includes an item master database that stores generic information and specific information associated with one or more items and an inventory database that stores availability and price data associated with the items.

5 The transaction system also includes a transaction engine that receives an item availability request including one or more parameters. The transaction engine accesses the item master database and the inventory database to obtain information associated with the request and determines one or more items that meet the parameters of the request. The transaction system also communicates a list of the

10 items meeting the parameters. The list includes at least one generic item listing. Furthermore, the transaction system receives a request for an item associated with a generic item listing and completes a transaction associated with the item.

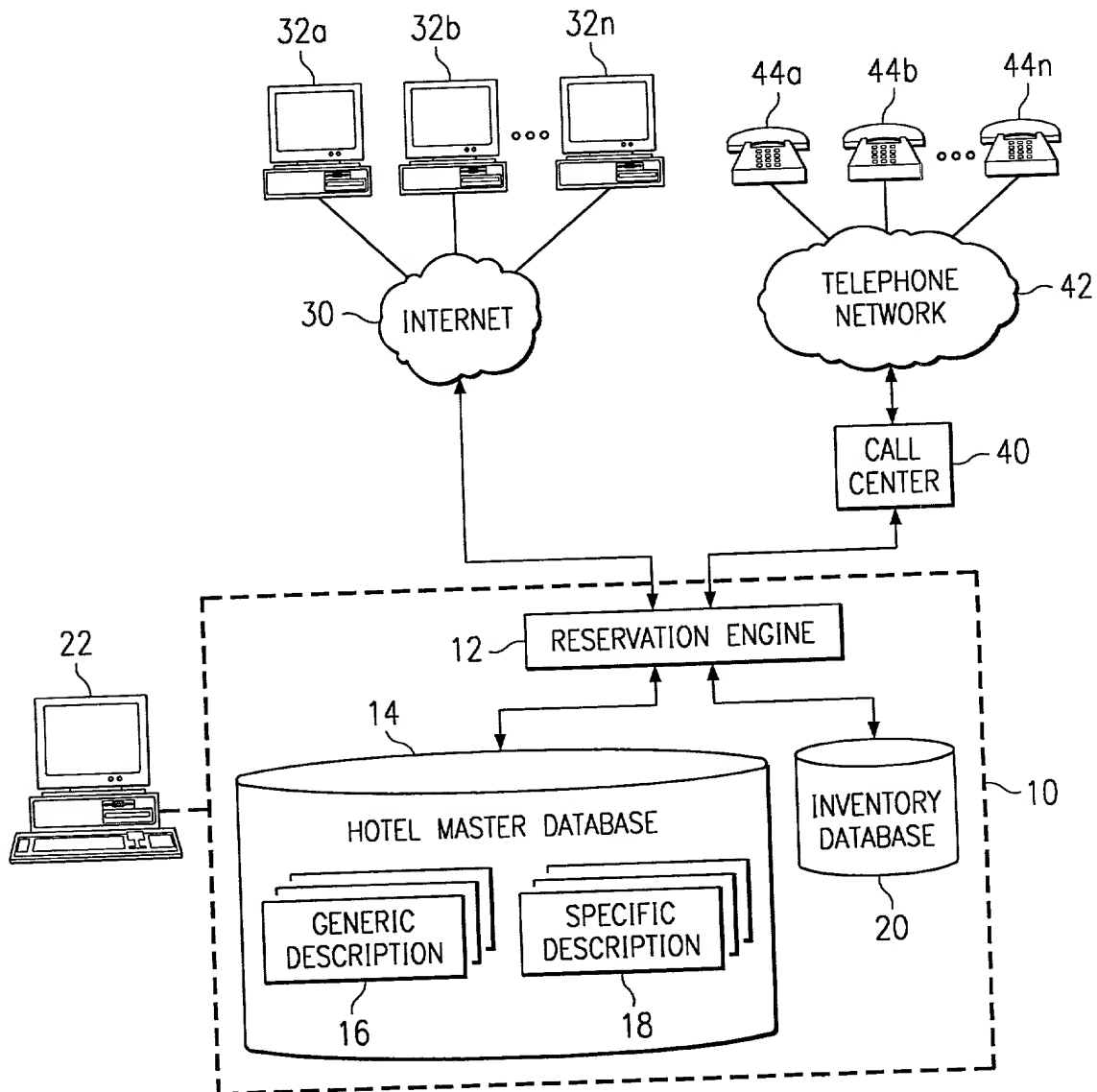


FIG. 1

100

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102

Check In Date: May 29, 2000

of Nights: 2

of Adults: 2

of Children: 0

of Beds: 1

Smoking: No

Display ONLY Available Hotels
(please book one room at a time)

Other Searches

View ALL Hotels in New York

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- by Quality (Star Rating)

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FIG. 2

FIG. 3

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








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(Rates listed are for Double Occupancy in US Dollars, not including taxes)

112

Hotel Name	Location	Click Below	5/29/00	5/30/00
*** *SPECIAL VALUE* 114 MAJOR BRAND HOTEL ← MIDTOWN		  	179.95	179.95
** *SPECIAL VALUE* THE BELLECLAIRE ← 116 77TH/BWY		  	169.95	154.95
**** *SPECIAL VALUE* 116 BROADWAY PLAZA ← 27TH AND BROADWAY		  	185.95	185.95
**** *SPECIAL VALUE* CARNEGIE SUITES ← 116 58TH/BWY		  	169.95	169.95
*** CLARION FIFTH AVENUE ← 116 MIDTOWN/FIFTH AVENUE		  	232.04	249.95
* *SPECIAL VALUE* 116 HOWARD JOHNSON 34TH ← 34TH/8TH		  	129.95	129.95
*** *SPECIAL VALUE* MILFORD PLAZA ← 116 45TH/8TH		  	129.95	129.95
***** *PRESIDENT'S CHOICE* MAJOR BRAND HOTEL ← 114 CENTRAL PARK		  	199.95	199.95
***** SHERATON NY ← 116 52ND/7TH		  	198.95	198.95
**** EMPIRE - STANDARD ← 116 63RD/BWY		  	129.95	179.95
*** *PRESIDENT'S CHOICE* WALDORF-STAFF ROOM ← 116 PARK/50TH		  	199.95	199.95

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MAJOR BRAND HOTEL
 ★★★★★

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MAJOR BRAND HOTEL
 NEW YORK, NY
 MIDTOWN

Hotel Description
 Charming, superior first class landmark hotel near the Theatre District and a short walk from Times Square. Rooms featuring: Individual climate control, cable TV, hairdryer, robe, computer-compatible, phone and safe. Recent additions include state-of-the-art fitness center and full-service business center. Garage parking across the street is available for guests at \$25. Maximum number of person is two per room.

Stay Information:

- Check in time: 3:00 PM
- Check out time: 12:00 PM
- Saturday Arrival: Yes

Property Amenities:

- Hotel Parking
- Restaurant
- Lounge
- Gym
- Air Conditioning




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FIG. 4

FIG. 5

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New York, New York

travel agents
 click here

Make Reservation for : MAJOR BRAND HOTEL
 Arriving: Monday, May 29, 2000
 *=required fields

- Select Room Type

5/29/2000 5/30/2000

☒ STANDARD /1-2 PERSON
← 142 USD \$279.95 \$279.95
- Enter Guest Name & Email

*First/Last:

← 144

*E-Mail Address:

Business Name:
- Enter your Address as it appears on your Credit Card Statement

*Address:

← 144

*City:

State/Province

*US & Canada only: ☐

*Country: UNITED STATES

Zip/Postal Code

*US & Canada only: ☐
- Enter Contact Info (a work or home phone number is required)

← 144

Work Phone:

extension

Home Phone:

Fax:
- Select Payment Option (reservations prepaid on Credit Card)

← 144

All Credit Card Information is Encrypted for Privacy over the Internet

Credit Card
 Encrypted for Security:

☐ VISA ☐ American Express ☐ MasterCard
☐ Discover ☐ Diner's Club

Card Number

Expiration Month

Year

- OR -:

 - OR -:

☐ Fax Credit Card Number and Expiration Date
 to Hotel Reservations Network at 214-363-3978
 Refer to CODE HRN

☐ I will call 1-800-715-7666 ext. 1379 with my credit
 card information

Click to CONTINUE Reservation

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Please REVIEW your information, then CLICK below to submit reservation.

Reservation in New York at MAJOR BRAND HOTEL for:
1 Non-Smoking Room with 1 Bed for 2 Adults

Room Type/Rate:	5/29/2000	5/30/2000
STANDARD /1-2 PERSON (USD excluding local tax)	279.95	279.95

Total Price for 2 nights:
(USD including local tax and fees) 640.00

Your Name and Credit Card Billing Address:
JOHN M. PRICE
200 MAIN ST.
DALLAS, TX 75201

Phone Numbers:
Work: 214-543-5432 Email: jprice@aol.com

Payment Option:
MasterCard # 5401999999999999 Exp Date: 09/02

[Click to BOOK Reservation](#) 154

– OR –

[Click to Go Back and Change Your Information](#)

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FIG. 6

FIG. 7

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RESERVATION
CONFIRMATION

Congratulations! Your reservation has been succesfully booked.

Your HRN Booking/Confirmation Number is: 123434567

Your reservation is part of the Hotel Reservations Network block of rooms at the Hotel. Information on individual reservations is not available at the Hotel. Please refer to the Hotel Reservations Booking/Confirmation Number above if you contact HRN for any reason.

===Contact Information and Quick Links===

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Home Page
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Map to the Hotel
Hot Deals
Free Newsletter
Discount Car Rental

162

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The CitySearch city guides provide the best information for visitors to the city. Our up-to-date information includes arts and entertainment events, restaurants, business services and more. All you need to plan your business or leisure trip. newyork.citysearch.com

Want to buy tickets for arts & entertainment events while visiting the city? Find out what's playing and purchase online at Ticketmaster.com

===Reservation Details===

164

Guest:	Stay Information:
JOHN M. PRICE	Check In: 05/29/2000
200 MAIN ST.	Number of Nights: 2
DALLAS, TX 75201	Number of Adults: 2
	Number of Children: 0
Hotel:	Room Type: STANDARD /1-2 PERSON
GARDEN PLACE SUITES	Smoking: N
	Refund Policy: NON-REFUNDABLE
Total Price including Tax and Fees: \$640.00	

FIG. 8

170

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HOTEL INFO

GARDEN PLACE SUITES

★★★★★

GARDEN PLACE SUITES

64 W 44TH ST

NEW YORK, NY 10036

44TH/6TH

Hotel Description

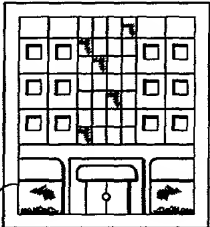
172

174

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MAP



EXTERIOR

Charming, superior first class landmark hotel adjacent to the Theatre District and a three-minute walk from Times Square. English country manor ambiance with rooms featuring: Individual climate control, cable TV, hairdryer, robe, computer-compatible, phone and safe. Recent additions include state-of-the-art fitness center and a full-service business center. Garage parking across the street is available for guests at \$25. The hotel's Lobby cafe is open daily from 7:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, and 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 for Friday and Saturday. Maximum number of persons is two per room.

Hotel Information:

- Rating: 4.0 Stars
- Floors: 12
- Rooms: 142
- Handicap Access: Yes

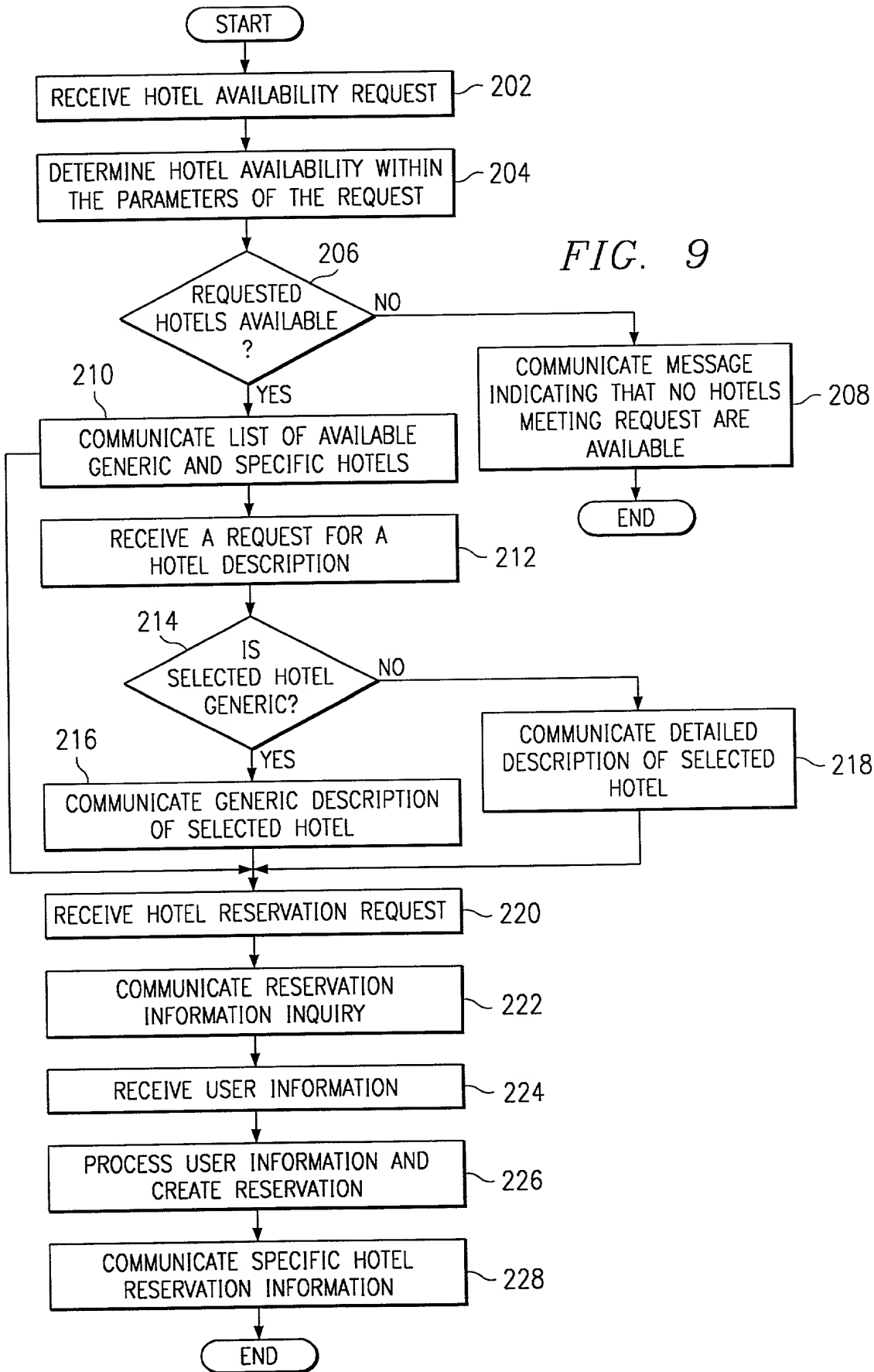
Stay Information:

- Check in time: 3:00 PM
- Check out time: 12:00 PM
- Saturday Arrival: Yes

Property Amenities:

- Hotel Parking
- Restaurant
- Lounge
- Gym
- Air Conditioning

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DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

As a below named inventor, I declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name, that I believe I am the original, first and joint inventor of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention or design entitled SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING GENERICALLY IDENTIFIED ITEMS , the specification of which is attached hereto; that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above; and that I acknowledge the duty to disclose to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to patentability as defined in 37 C.F.R. § 1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. § 119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Date Filed</u>	<u>Priority Claimed (Yes) (No)</u>
---------------	----------------	-----------------------	--

-----NONE-----

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application(s) in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to patentability as defined in 37 C.F.R. § 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application(s) and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

Application

Serial Number

Date Filed

Status

-----NONE-----

I hereby appoint:

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Robert M. Chiaviello, Jr.	Reg. No. 32,461
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Thomas R. Felger	Reg. No. 28,842
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Jeffery D. Baxter
Thomas A. Beaton
Kurt M. Pankratz

Reg. No. 45,560
Reg. No. P46,543
Reg. No. P46,977

Patent Agents:

Brian A. Dietzel
Kevin R. Imes

Reg. No. 44,656
Reg. No. 44,795

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Kevin J. Meek
at (214) 953-6680
Atty. Docket No. 068068.0103

I declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

Full name of the first inventor

David S. Litman

Inventor's signature

Date

Residence (City, County, State)

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Citizenship

United States of America

Post Office Address

5001 Swiss Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75214

Full name of second inventor

Robert B. Diener

Inventor's signature

Date

Residence (City, County, State)

Surfside, Dade County, Florida

Citizenship

United States of America

Post Office Address

8877 Collins Avenue
Surfside, Florida 33154

Full name of third inventor

Anthony Fiacable

Inventor's signature

Date

Residence (City, County, State)

Citizenship

Post Office Address